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Issues

for
RHODE ISLAND
MANAGEMENT



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GOOD MORALE AND PRODUCTIVITY: To keep them both high, involve employees in decisions, and give them a chance to grow.

Are your employees assets to your operation? Or are they just hired hands to whom you pay working wages in return for doing specified jobs?

How you view your employees can have a direct bearing on your agency's ability to operate efficiently. It can affect how readily changes in policy and procedure are accepted. And it can influence how much dedication your people bring to their jobs.

"The working environment has changed, and if you want to encourage productivity you have to know how to motivate." Those are the words of Dr. Clayton Sherman, management consultant with Beta Group, Ltd., a firm that specializes in management and employee education and development.

Before productivity can be stimulated, explains Sherman, you have to provide employee satisfaction. The two are inseparable. If employee morale is low, then chances are productivity will be too.

There's no shortage of motivation theories available, but Sherman points out one overriding fact — motivation today requires more than just monetary rewards. The contemporary worker wants to feel involved. A sense of personal significance ranks high on his list of demands.

People today see themselves as individuals who can provide a service to their employers. When they believe that there is a meaningful purpose behind their work they are more apt to be responsible and efficient.

Involved in decisions.

That sense of personal significance requires them to feel that they are a part of the decision-making process. While you don't want to include employees in each and every decision that has to be made, at a minimum you should make the effort to keep them informed.

More appropriately, you should solicit their opinions on matters by which they'll be directly affected. For example, you shouldn't change operating policies without first seeking the input of your subordinate managers.

"It's called participative management," explains Sherman. "You have to let them have a say. The 'I'm the top dog' style no longer motivates, but by involving your employees more you can arrange certain conditions that release their energy in your favor."

State agencies should manage for results. What are your objectives? Is your staff aware of them? "If you don't manage by objectives, you don't manage at all," claims Sherman. "And for you to get results you want, your staff must know what the objectives are. You have to

have their cooperation in order to succeed."

People work harder to implement decisions and strategies that they understand. On the other hand, when you make decisions from above without taking into consideration the feelings of your employees, you may very well set yourself up for failure. Gradual preparation for change diminishes its impact on staff. Policy and procedural changes are more enthusiastically accepted when employees have been made to feel involved in the planning that was behind the decisions.

Employee development.

Your employees also need to feel that they can grow in their jobs. Most agencies have some sort of training programs, but they are often primitive and involve only teaching a person to do a specific task.

Employee development is more than simple training. It's creating an atmosphere that is both trusting and challenging. Many employees like to be challenged. And they like to believe that you trust their ability enough to give them some responsibility.

The past decade has seen a dramatic change in how employees are viewed. Phrases such as "human resources" and "human assets" have come into widespread use, according to Sherman.

Many managers believe that "human assets" can appreciate in value. Employee development — or increasing the value of assets — has become increasingly important.

Employee development can include several phases: formal in-house orientation sessions; outside seminars, workshops, conferences, or schools; and on-the-job training.

"Our experience as consultants for management is that the best programs are those that assist a supervisor in developing the people working under him," says Sherman. "Other methods can't be overlooked by any means, but the overall program should be directed and monitored by the supervisor."

In other words, your unit supervisor should handle the training and development of people in his unit. Your section supervisor should be in charge of training and development of section personnel. Your division supervisors should be responsible for their personnel.

Sherman also strongly advocates that the supervisor be directly involved in teaching specific jobs. "The employee not only learns the job, but senses that he is being taught by someone who is a winner because he has already mastered it," he explains.

Development occurs on the job as the employee's confidence grows. The supervisor should evaluate the employee's work and rein-

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COMMUNICATIONS: An Essential Tool of Management

Part VI in a continuing series for public service managers on effectively communicating with employees.

Synopsis of Part V — (Issues — September, 1987). Part V covered the importance of a sound communications policy to keep employees informed and the sort of information that employees are generally seeking was explored. The subject of attracting new employees was touched upon, and two guiding principles for successful recruiting messages were suggested.

Preparing the new employee for the job. —

Good employee orientation and training relies 100% on good communications. To perform their jobs with maximum effectiveness, all employees need to be explicitly informed of what's expected of them, and carefully taught how to achieve these goals. Even minor breakdowns here can mean costly work errors, inefficiencies, and needless problems for your agency.

What can you do to ensure top-notch orientation and training communications? You can:

- Set up a formal orientation program, delegating responsibility for covering each new employee information need to a specific person.
- Use the *New Employee Orientation Checklists* provided by the Office of Personnel Administration (OPA).
- Carefully review training methods and procedures, to determine whether employees are receiving adequate and effective instruction.
- Train instructors in communications skills.

Publicizing your employee benefits. —

Employee benefits that go unpublicized are potential morale-boosters wasted. If employees aren't kept informed on "how good they have it," all the dollars spent on these extras will go down the drain. To publicize employee benefits, your agency can choose from an almost limitless selection of publicity ideas. Regardless of their form, however, all benefits communications should answer these four basic questions for employees:

- Am I eligible?
- What do I get out of it? How will it help me and my dependents?
- What does it cost me?
- When do I benefit?

Communicating policies and rules. —

Adequate information given to employees during the orientation and training period will prevent many unintentional infractions of rules. But slip-ups and disciplinary problems can be even further minimized if you:

- Make certain employees understand that certain matters affecting their work rules are governed by laws, regulations and higher authority.
- Review existing policies and rules to ensure that they are fair and reasonable — that the agency is not, in fact, asking the impossible.
- Put policies and rules in written reference form in a manual.
- Provide sound guidelines — and training — for supervisors on rule administration and discipline.

Check your communications approach. —

Most employees consider themselves to be responsible adults, and resent being bluntly ordered to obey. Yet, many manuals continue to raise hackles with such phrases as "Workers are not allowed ..." or "All employees shall ..." A better way: Strive to explain how following the rules will make employees' jobs easier, safer, and working conditions more pleasant.

Correcting misinformation and dispelling rumors. —

Untrue rumors, circulated either inside or outside your agency, can often have devastating effects on employee morale and public opinion.

There are several steps your agency can take to dispel dangerous rumors:

- *Encourage employees to ask management.* — Few rumors will be able to gain a foothold if employees are given the chance to ask management for the facts.
- *Watch for indications that rumors exist.* — Questions from employees or from the public will often point the way to a thriving rumor. Of course, it's essential to keep tabs on what outside news media publish about your agency, too.

Some private sector firms reduce the adverse effects of the grapevine by setting up a "rumor board" where rumors are posted along with management's response with the facts.

- *Look for the cause.* — Executives and managers have an obligation to root out destructive rumors. By finding out how the rumor got started,

you'll be able to plan a constructive course. Valid information can be substituted for misinformation.

- *Review your communications policies.* — Rumors most often crop up where there is an information gap. Make sure you're keeping employees as fully informed as they need to be.

Building better community relations. —

A favorable community image of your agency in the area (or areas) where it "lives" can produce many benefits.

Where to start: Like charity, winning good community opinion must begin at home, since your employees, as members of the community themselves, are your most influential good will ambassadors.

How to start:

- Make special efforts to sell employees on your agency's viewpoints with an education program.
- Keep them aware of their role as agency representatives and opinion leaders, both on and off the job.

Management's Communications tools.

Good communication depends as much on *how you say it* as on what you have to say. And deciding how to say it is, in most organizations, top management's job. Therefore, it's important that your top officers familiarize themselves with a wide variety of media.

Oral and written communications.

Face-to-face conversation is superior, under most circumstances, to written or printed communications of any type. For one thing, talking is usually easier, simpler and takes less time than composing a written message. For another, it can convey many nuances of meaning through gesture and expression that may be extremely difficult to put into writing.

Most modern organizations, however, would find it almost impossible to rely wholly on the spoken word, or individual and group meetings, to meet their communications needs. Often, their information volume is too great, their workforce is too widely scattered, or there are simply too many employees to gather together for a talk. In addition, the nature of the information is frequently such that it requires a permanent, written record for future reference.

Therefore, management today uses many communications tools, that are basically some form of written message; manuals, bulletin boards, newspapers, letters and the like. And while these tools may not be as simple to employ as conversation, they can be just as effective if properly chosen and utilized.

For very important messages, both oral and written communications are sometimes used in combination. For instance, a supervisor may call a meeting to explain a new procedure, answer employees' questions, and perhaps make adjustments to meet objections. Once general agreement has been reached, the new procedure may be put into writing for permanent reference.

Next time in *ISSUES* — Part VII of Communications — Steps to open up communications with employees and provide genuine opportunities for participative management; why it's important to hold meetings; and, when to use bulletin boards.

ISSUES

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Human Resources Information Systems Bibliography. The Association of Human Resource Systems Professionals, Inc. 1986. 38 pp. \$10.

This is a comprehensive bibliography of published and unpublished works on human resources systems and their use. It includes listings for articles submitted to HRSP annual conference Call for Papers, which are available from the authors. Order from the HRSP, Inc., P.O. Box 8040-A202, Walnut Creek, CA 94596.

Personnel Policies Workbook. Prentice Hall Information Services, 1987. 600 pp. \$100.

This workbook is a hands-on guide to developing policies and employee handbooks. The sections outline a step-by-step process for identifying needs, addressing federal laws, implementing policies, and having the policies accepted throughout the organization. Also included is a policy digest listing policies that have been successfully implemented in organizations throughout the country.

Absence and Lateness: How to Reduce It, How to Control It. By Louise Pitone. Business & Legal Reports, 1986. 88 pp. \$24.95.

This book suggests some simple ideas to get people to work on time every day. It tells how to keep and analyze attendance records, communicate to problem employees, enlist supervisor support, reward punctuality, control sick leave, and more.

The Human Side of Management. By George S. Odiorne. Lexington Books, 1987. 236 pp. \$24.95.

The author shows how organizations can motivate all employees by integrating the needs of the organization with the needs of the workers, by improving goal setting and performance monitoring, and by regarding achievement at every level. He discusses the reasons for poor performance and shows how to deal with common problems facing employers today.

GOOD MORALE AND PRODUCTIVITY . . .

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force everything that has been done correctly. A pat on the back can go a long way. Criticism should be constructive.

But development does not come from repeating one task over and over. As employees prove their abilities and trustworthiness, they should be allowed to expand into other areas, even those where they have not had previous experience, says Sherman.

"Development comes from gaining additional information and skills that were not previously in their performance repertoire," he explains. "Give them exposure, let them take risks. Eventually all employees must be charged with responsibilities and allowed to mature fully in their jobs."

Increasing employee satisfaction — and thus productivity — can involve even more than making your employees part of the decision-making process, and allowing them to develop in their jobs.

There are such things as working hours — providing flexible hours or allowing certain employees to share their jobs with others so they can work part-time. It can involve providing career advancement opportunities to people. The point is, you have to make an effort to understand your employees' needs.

"Make your agency fit the people, and not vice versa," explains Sherman. "There's no one right way, but look at your situation to see how you can make your employees feel that they are needed."

The beneficiaries of such a management philosophy are not only the employees, but the agency and ultimately state government as well. The more you can do to assure increased productivity, the better will be your service to the citizens of the state. By taking the necessary steps to motivate your employees, you are simply adjusting to the realities of an evolving working environment.

EVERYTHING YOU NEVER WANTED TO KNOW

How to cut off communications that don't tell you anything.

As a general rule, the more information you have, the better you can manage. But as with all general rules, there are exceptions. Some information may seem useless to you — even counter-productive.

Here are some examples:

- **Statistics you don't need.** Perhaps somehow you got on the routing list for another division's reports. Or you regularly receive statistics only peripherally related to your operation.

- **Badmouthing.** Your colleagues or subordinates regularly corral you to gripe about others. Your feeling is that there's no news in this, just a spreading of ill will.

- **Complaints you can't resolve.** You've nagged the Building Maintenance Office all you can about the inadequate ventilating system, or you've been unable to get an annoying procedure changed. Still, your employees keep badgering you.

Before dismissing all these reports, it's important to ask yourself: Why am I getting all this information?

If operation statistics are being sent automatically to every manager, you can probably ignore them. But maybe they signal a change in your responsibilities and are worth studying. Find out exactly why you are being sent this material.

Gossip about others may mask underlying interpersonal problems. Before discounting it, be sure there isn't a situation behind it that requires your attention. The same is true if rigid procedures are preventing people from working effectively.

Once you've determined that you're being told more than you need to know, here's what you can do:

- **Get off the list.** In some cases, all it takes is a request to your secretary to remove your name from certain routing slips inside the agency.

- **Limit your contact.** You know there are certain people who will collar you at every opportunity. It's easier to cut them short if you conduct your regular business with them over the telephone. Don't linger when you pass them in the hall, and make every effort to avoid places where they can trap you, like the cafeteria.

- **Change the subject** when the conversation strays into areas you don't want to get into. Be as persistent in this as the other person is in reintroducing it. Chances are, your message will eventually get across.

- **Cut it off.** If subtler methods don't work, then be direct. Say, "I'm sorry, I don't want to talk about that." Or, "I really would rather not hear about that again."

Make sure you cut off only the information that genuinely wastes your time and energies. Learn to recognize what you need to know and weed out the rest.

STAYING LATE AT THE OFFICE

It's the end of the day and you're on your way out, ready to join the crowd in the parking lot. There's a light on in your colleague's office. Poor guy, you think — stuck in the office, working late.

But maybe you're wasting your pity. It could be that he's chosen to stay late. Many people regard after hours as prime time for helping their careers along.

There's a change in the mood of an office after most people have gone and a few are left. Suddenly it's quiet, the phones don't ring; the people who remain are more relaxed — even if they are there to work. Informality takes over.

Here's how you can put this time to good use:

- **Information.** It's easier to chat about what's happening when the pressure is off and the mood friendly. Now is the time to find out the latest: from trivia to vital agency decisions or your associates' latest ideas.

- **Networking.** In the informal atmosphere that descends over a semi-deserted workplace, it's easier to go office-hopping to let people

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LIBEL AND SLANDER — Possible Personal Liability for Managers.

The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals recently held that an employer that publicized its policy on sexual harassment, following the discharge of an employee for such misconduct, was entitled to a "qualified" privilege protecting it from libel and slander charges brought by the discharged employee.

In 1981, the plaintiff, a maintenance technician for a large chemical company, was told to go with a female co-employee in a company pickup truck to work on a blocked line in the chemical loading area of the plant.

The following Monday, the female employee resigned telling a supervisor about the male employee's verbal and physical harassment on the way to the loading dock. She stated she quit because "women are not made to feel like a part of the team unless the men can have their way with them, and no one does anything about it."

Upon learning of these charges, the employer investigated the allegations of the male's misconduct and eventually discharged him for harassing the female employee.

The company then issued a one page memo to 140 plant supervisors that stated the company's policy against sexual harassment. The memo referred to the male employee's firing, although not by name, calling the incident "a serious act of employee misconduct." The supervisors were instructed to relay key points of the sexual harassment policy to all employees, but the memo was not distributed to employees or posted on bulletin boards.

The male employee that was dismissed sued the chemical company for libel and slander. Libel and slander consist respectively of a written or oral false statement, "published" (read or heard by others), "unprivileged," causing the plaintiff damage.

The jury awarded the plaintiff \$93,000 in compensatory damages and denied punitive damages.

The Fifth Circuit reversed the decision of the trial court and jury, holding the company was entitled to a "qualified privilege" to communicate with its employees without fear of libel or slander claims. The court noted the bulletin was clearly issued in good faith and for a proper purpose.

The court also noted that although the employer's communication with supervisors was reasonable, the jury trial did not fully determine the supervisors' activities publicizing the memo to employees. Con-

sequently, the court remanded the case to the trial court to determine whether the employer abused the "qualified privilege" by excessive publication — *Garziano vs. E. I. Du Pont de Nemours & Co.*, — F2d —, Case No. 86-4025 (5th Cir. 1987).

In another recent decision, a federal district court held a supervisor personally liable for racial discrimination and compensatory damages based upon the finding that his submission of negative recommendations to plaintiff's prospective employer as racially motivated. The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the decision; the US Supreme Court denied the review. — *Foulks vs. Ohio Dept. of Rehabilitation and Correction*, — F2d —, (6th Cir. 1986), cert. denied, US, Case No. 86-820 (1987).

IMPACT: Agencies should carefully monitor all statements "published" internally or externally describing terminations or other personnel decisions. Standardizing the method of communicating a former employee's employment, such as providing only dates of employment and positions held, is one way of precluding "publication" of negative information. In addition, all levels of management and supervision should be instructed regarding communication of information whether to co-workers or non-employees.

STAYING LATE . . .

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know what's on your mind. They're apt to be more responsive when you sound them out about your pet project, and might steer you to other sympathetic sources. The fact that you're there with them at an unofficial time establishes a bond between you.

• **Catching up.** For many managers, uninterrupted time is a rarity. The one or two hours they can spend after hours with the door closed may be more productive than an entire fragmented day.

• **Socializing.** For some, it's easier to speak to coworkers when work stress — and the watchful eyes of superiors — are absent. Socializing can be difficult during the course of a day. Take advantage of this time to chat with those you'd like to know better.

Staying late needn't become a habit — since it can be a drain on your energy. But once in a while, you can allow yourself to disregard the clock and make after hours into quality time.

ISSUES IS SPONSORED BY THE FOLLOWING DEFERRED COMPENSATION CARRIERS . . .

Deferred Compensation — an employee benefit with far-reaching advantages . . .

State employees can save for the future by participating in the deferred compensation program, a way of putting money aside without having to pay taxes on it, or the income it earns, until retirement when your tax rate is usually lower. Managers can assist their employees in learning more about deferred compensation by showing them an audio-visual presentation that clearly explains the deferred compensation program. To arrange to show this slide-tape production, call the Employee Benefits Section, Office of Personnel Administration at 277-3160.

This newsletter is sponsored by the state's three carriers of the deferred compensation plan.



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